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THE SITUATION CONCERNING WESTERN SAHARA

Report by the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. In my letter of 25 March 1992 (S/23754) to the President of the Security Council I informed him of the appointment of Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan as my new Special Representative for Western Sahara. In his response to me of the same date (S/23755), the President reiterated the Council's support for my efforts and those to be made by the Special Representative to accelerate the implementation of the Settlement Plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara and expressed interest in receiving from me a further report on the progress made in the implementation of the Plan. As desired by the Council and in pursuance of the intention expressed in paragraph 30 of my report to the Council of 28 February 1992 (S/23662) the present report addresses the current status of the implementation of the Plan in its different aspects.

I. MILITARY ASPECTS

2. As of 20 May 1992, the military strength of MINURSO was 349, including 229 United Nations Military Observers.

(a) United Nations military observers and headquarters personnel:

Argentina	7
Australia	2
Austria	1
Bangladesh	1
Canada	14
China	20
Egypt	9
France	30

Ghana	1
Greece	1
Guinea	1
Ireland	6
Italy	6
Kenya	10
Malaysia	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	1
Peru	15
Poland	2
Russia	30
Switzerland	1
Tunisia	9
UK	15
USA	30
Venezuela	15
Total	229

(b) Contingents

(1) Signals unit: Australia	43
(2) Medical unit: Switzerland	61
(3) Movement Control: Canada	16
Total	120
Grand total	349

3. In view of the extension of MINURSO's mandate beyond the duration estimated in the Settlement Plan, troop-contributing Governments have agreed to rotate their contingents at the end of their scheduled tour of duty. Such rotations had been completed by the end of April 1992.

4. After serving with distinction as the Force Commander of MINURSO since its inception, Major-General Armand Roy (Canada), completed his assignment on 24 April 1992 and returned to his home country in order to assume a new command there. Since that date the Deputy Force Commander, Brigadier-General Luis Block Urban (Peru), has served as the Force Commander a.i.

5. During the reporting period, the deployment of United Nations military observers has remained as described in paragraphs 4 and 5 of my last report to the Council on 28 February 1992, except that the previous central and southern sectors have been marged into one single southern sector. Its headquarters has been established at Dakhla.

6. In its present limited deployment, the role of the MINURSO military unit is essentially limited to monitoring and verifying the cease-fire into which the parties have entered. Since my last report, a total of 102 violations - none of them involving casualties - have been reported by MINURSO, 97 of which were attributed to Morocco and the remaining five to the Polisario. Most of these violations have involved improvement of defensive works such as the digging of anti-tank ditches, the construction of barriers and bunkers and the extension and reinforcement of existing fortifications. There have also been frequent complaints of overflights but with its limited resources MINURSO was in a position to positively identify only five aircraft involved in such overflights. On the other hand, it is noted with satisfaction that there have been no exchanges of fire between the two sides and no casualties resulting from intentional hostile action even though mine explosions have caused casualties on both sides.

II. OTHER ASPECTS

7. Shortly after his appointment, my Special Representative, Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan, made a tour of the mission area and the neighbouring countries lasting from 19 to 30 April 1992. During this tour the Special Representative met not only with the King of Morocco and the Secretary-General of the Polisario, but also with the Heads of State of Algeria and Mauritania. On the basis of his initial contacts with the parties, the Special Representative concluded that their respective positions remained far apart and that these differences continued to present serious obstacles to the implementation of the Settlement Plan. At the same time, he was encouraged to find that both parties continued to be committed to the Plan as a framework for a just and permanent solution to the Western Sahara conflict. Additionally, both Algeria and Mauritania promised him their full support and cooperation in order to overcome existing obstacles and to facilitate the execution of the Plan.

8. In the light of his findings, at the conclusion of the tour, the Special Representative explored with each of the parties their readiness to hold talks with him in an effort to reactivate the Plan. Both parties have agreed to do so. The talks are now under way and are being held within the framework of the Settlement Plan.

III. OBSERVATIONS

9. It is my expectation that in their talks with the Special Representative, both parties will cooperate with him in efforts to promote trust and confidence and to create an atmosphere conducive to the smooth implementation of the Plan.

10. Regardless of the progress of the current talks, I remain convinced of the need for maintaining the current military strength of MINURSO in Western Sahara in order to adequately monitor the cease-fire. Although cease-fire violations have continued to occur and their frequency has even increased somewhat since my last report, the incidents reported have generally not been of a violent nature; nor has there been a single battle casualty on either side since MINURSO was deployed last year. Furthermore, during the Special Representative's visit to the area, he was assured by both parties concerned that they would make every effort to adhere to the provisions of the cease-fire agreement and to cooperate with MINURSO within the framework of the Settlement Plan. Thus, I would expect compliance with the cease-fire to improve significantly over the coming months.

11. In the light of the foregoing and bearing in mind the critical role MINURSO observers are playing for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity pending the settlement of the conflict, I recommend that the Council extend MINURSO's mandate for a further period of three months i.e. until the end of August 1992. It is my hope that by then substantial progress would have been made to prepare the ground for the holding of a referendum leading to the peaceful settlement of the Western Sahara conflict. However, if by that time the peace process remains deadlocked, notwithstanding the efforts currently being made by my Special Representative in his talks with the parties, the Security Council might wish to consider a different approach.